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HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

From the Beginnings to the Modern Era

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

THE AUGUSTAN AGE

THE ROMANTIC AGE

THE MODERN LITERATURE

Md. Nazmul Haque

Book Title

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

A book capturing 1000 years of English history like a heart-winning Visual thriller Story !

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A MASTERPIECE OF
HISTORY, LITERATURE
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1. Old English Age (c. 450–1066)

The age of warriors and wandering singers

Long ago, England was not England as we know it. It was a land of forests, cold seas, and battles. People lived in tribes. They did not read books. They listened.

At night, warriors sat around fire. Poets moved around and sang stories of brave heroes. The greatest story was Beowulf—a man who fights monsters, not for money, but for honor.

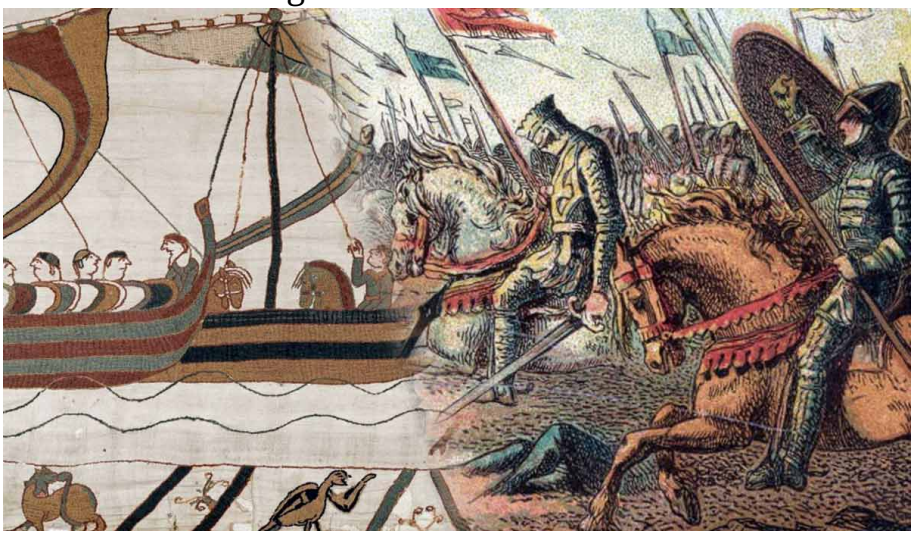
People believed in fate. They thought:

"What is written will happen."

Later, Christianity came. So poems slowly mixed God with swords.

Why this age ended ?

In 1066, the Normans invaded England.



The Normans were a group of Vikings from Norway, Denmark who sailed across seas and attacked many lands. Some of them settled in France
The French king said to them:

“Stop fighting. Live here and protect us.”

That area was called Normandy. The Vikings there slowly changed:

▶*They learned the French language*
▶*They followed French culture*
▶*They became Christians*

These Viking French people were called Normans. In 1066, the Norman leader William crossed the English Channel and fought the English king Harold. William won the battle. He became king of England and was called William the Conqueror.

After the Normans came:

✔*English language changed*
✔*Many French words entered English*
✔*Literature and culture also changed*
✔*Old English slowly became Middle English*

2. Middle English Age (1066–1500)

The age of pilgrims, priests, and people

After the Norman Conquest, English changed. It became softer, simpler, and closer to the common people. Now literature was not only about kings and warriors. It was about ordinary men and women. Geoffrey Chaucer came. He did something new. He let common people speak—a miller, a cook, a wife, a priest. In The Canterbury Tales, they travel together and tell stories—funny, dirty, serious, holy. People laughed at society. They questioned the church. They observed life.

Why this age ended?

The middle age the human mind believed that truth had already been given by God; human beings were not expected to discover new truths, only to follow them. The world was quiet, fearful, and deeply religious. Life moved according to the scriptures and Church, not from observation or experiment.

But history, like a restless traveller, does not stay in one place. Slowly, changes began to stir across Europe. Trade routes expanded. Cities grew. The printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century, began to spread books beyond monasteries and royal courts. At the same time, something even more powerful was

happening: people were beginning to ask questions.

. **Johannes Gutenberg**

The total scenario changed. Ships left the shores of Europe, sailing into an unknown ocean. Sailors look at the horizon with curiosity instead of fear. Human attention moved from heaven to earth, from religion to human experience, from authority to discovery. Christopher Columbus reached the Americas in 1492, and later Vasco da Gama sailed to India.

Vasco da Gama Arriving at Calicut, India

The world suddenly became larger. Old maps were wrong. Old assumptions were questioned. If geography could change, perhaps knowledge itself could change too.

At the same time, science began to challenge tradition. Copernicus suggested that the earth moves around the sun which was totally opposite to the idea given by the scriptures.

Astronomer Copernicus

Later, Galileo used observation and experiment to understand nature. These ideas encouraged people to trust human reason and evidence, not just religious authority. The Renaissance Age begins.

3. Renaissance Age (1500–1660)

1. The Early Renaissance / Tudor Period (1500–1558)

2. The Elizabethan Age (1558–1603)
3. The Jacobean Age (1603–1625)
4. The Caroline and Commonwealth Period (1625–1660)

The Renaissance Age in English literature (1500–1660) is often called the early modern period, when England moved from medieval religious thinking toward humanism, creativity, scientific curiosity, and political change.

This long period is usually divided into four smaller ages, each with its own character and literary voice. We may think of the Renaissance not as one moment, but as a long sunrise where the light gradually becomes brighter.

1. The Early Renaissance / Tudor Period (1500–1558)

This period begins when the Renaissance spirit from Italy slowly reaches England. It was a time of transition, when medieval ideas were still strong but new learning had begun to grow. The most powerful influence was humanism, which encouraged the study of Greek and Latin classics.

Humanism in Italian renaissance art

Scholars began to believe that education could develop the full potential of human beings. One major historical event shaped literature deeply was ***the Reformation***.

History of the Reformation:

Henry VIII married Catherine of Aragon in 1509. She had originally been the wife of Henry's older brother, Prince Arthur, who died young. To allow Henry to marry his

brother's widow, the Pope had earlier given special permission (Papal Dispensation). For many years, the marriage seemed stable. But Henry became worried because Catherine did not give birth to a surviving male heir — only a daughter, Mary. In those days, kings believed a male heir was necessary for political stability.

Henry later fell in love with Anne Boleyn and wanted to marry her. So Henry asked the Pope to annul (cancel) his marriage to Catherine, claiming that marrying his brother's widow had been wrong in God's eyes. He even used a Bible verse (from Leviticus) to support his argument. But the Pope refused. One major reason was political pressure. Catherine of Aragon was the aunt of Charles V, the powerful Holy Roman Emperor, who controlled much of Europe. The Pope was in a weak political position and could not easily offend Charles V by declaring Catherine's marriage invalid. There was also a religious reason. Since a previous Pope had already allowed Henry to marry Catherine, cancelling the marriage would suggest that the Church had made a serious mistake earlier. That would weaken papal authority. So the Pope delayed and avoided giving Henry the annulment. Frustrated by the Pope's refusal, Henry decided to separate England from the Roman Catholic Church (The Protestant). Through the Act of Supremacy (1534), he declared himself Head of the Church of England, which allowed him to annul the marriage and marry Anne Boleyn

The Dispensation to Marry Anne Boleyn

This moment became one of the most important events of the English Reformation and helped shape the Early Renaissance period in England. Henry broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and married Anne Boleyn in 1533. Soon after, a child was born — Elizabeth. Henry had hoped for a son, but the baby was a daughter. Anne Boleyn

was executed by beheading on May 19, 1536, in the Tower of London.

Shortly afterward, Henry married Jane Seymour. Jane later gave birth to Edward VI, the son Henry had long wanted. Anne Boleyn was accused of adultery with several men, incest with her brother, George Boleyn and also plotting the king's death. But most historians believe these accusations were false or pre-planned.

After her death, Elizabeth (only two and a half years old) was declared illegitimate. For a time, she lived quietly, away from political power. Yet during these difficult years, something important happened: Elizabeth received an excellent humanist education. She learnt Latin and Greek, history and philosophy, rhetoric and literature. She also later learned several languages, including French and Italian. So while Henry VIII's conflict with the Pope was political and religious, it also indirectly created a future queen who embodied Renaissance humanism.

When Henry VIII died in 1547, his son Edward became king — but he was only nine years old.

Edward became king at the age of 9 and died at 15

Because he was so young, powerful advisors ruled the country in his name. Edward was raised as a strong Protestant, and during his reign England moved further away from Catholicism. But Edward's life was very short. He became seriously ill — probably from tuberculosis — and died in 1553, when he was only 15 years old.
This is the key reason Elizabeth eventually became queen: Henry's only son died without children. Before Edward died, there was a political attempt to prevent Henry's daughters (***Mary/Elizabeth***) from ruling. Edward's advisors feared that Mary (Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon) would restore Catholicism. So they placed Lady Jane Grey on the throne. But this plan failed quickly.

Lady Jane Grey, the "Nine Days Queen"

The English people supported Mary, who became Queen Mary I in 1553. Mary ruled for five years (1553–1558). She tried to restore Roman Catholicism in England and became unpopular, especially because of the execution of Protestants. She is sometimes called “Bloody Mary.” Mary had no children, so when she died in 1558, the throne passed to Elizabeth, Henry VIII’s daughter by Anne Boleyn.

Two important literary pioneers of The Early Renaissance were:
Sir Thomas More — Utopia (1516), a vision of an ideal society
Thomas Wyatt & Surrey — introduced the sonnet form into English literature

Italian poet Petrarch

Wyatt learned from Italian poet Petrarch, bringing Renaissance poetic style into English. **Surrey** also helped develop blank verse, which later became essential for drama.vThis period is like the planting of seeds — the Renaissance had arrived, but it had not yet fully bloomed.

2. The Elizabethan Age (1558–1603)

This is often called the Golden Age of English literature, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. England was politically stable, economically growing, and filled with national pride and curiosity about the world.

It was also the great age of exploration. English sailors like Sir Francis Drake travelled across oceans, bringing stories of distant lands. This adventurous spirit entered literature.

Queen Elizabeth I knighting Sir Francis Drake on board The Golden Hind at Deptford 4th April, 1581

The theatre became the heart of literary life. Public playhouses like The Globe Theatre attracted people from all social classes.

The greatest writers of this period include:

▶William Shakespeare
▶Christopher Marlowe
▶Edmund Spenser
▶Sir Philip Sidney

Marlowe's heroes, such as Doctor Faustus, show Renaissance ambition — the desire for limitless knowledge and power. Spenser's The Faerie Queene celebrates moral virtue and national identity. Shakespeare explores human psychology and emotion more deeply than any writer before him. This age feels like a festival of creativity, where poetry, drama, and imagination flourish together.

Queen Elizabeth I was unmarried and remained a virgin through out her life. According to a well-spread rumour, she had a love-affair with ***Lord Robert Dudley***, who was also known as the earl of Leicester. The earl of Leicester occasionally had sweet trips with Elizabeth over the Thames.

Elizabeth wanted to marry him. But public scandal developed when his first wife was found murdered at the bottom of a staircase. Dudley was suspected of having murdered his wife so that he could wed the Queen. Elizabeth never married Dudley, or anyone else. She did not choose the life of desires rather she chose the life of virginity After Elizabeth's death in 1603, King James I (her cousin) came to the throne.

3. The Jacobean Age (1603–1625)

The age of King James I is called the Jacobean Age because the word “Jacobean” comes from “Jacobus,” which is the Latin form of “James.” In those times, it was common to use Latin to refer to rulers and their eras in a more formal or scholarly way. Before becoming King J of England , King James I was King James VI of Scotland. In this age , the mood of literature began to change. Political tensions increased, and writers became more interested in moral conflict, corruption, and the complexity of human nature.The earlier optimism of the Elizabethan period became more serious and sometimes darker. There is a reason behind it. King James I believed in Witchcraft and dark power of the Devil.

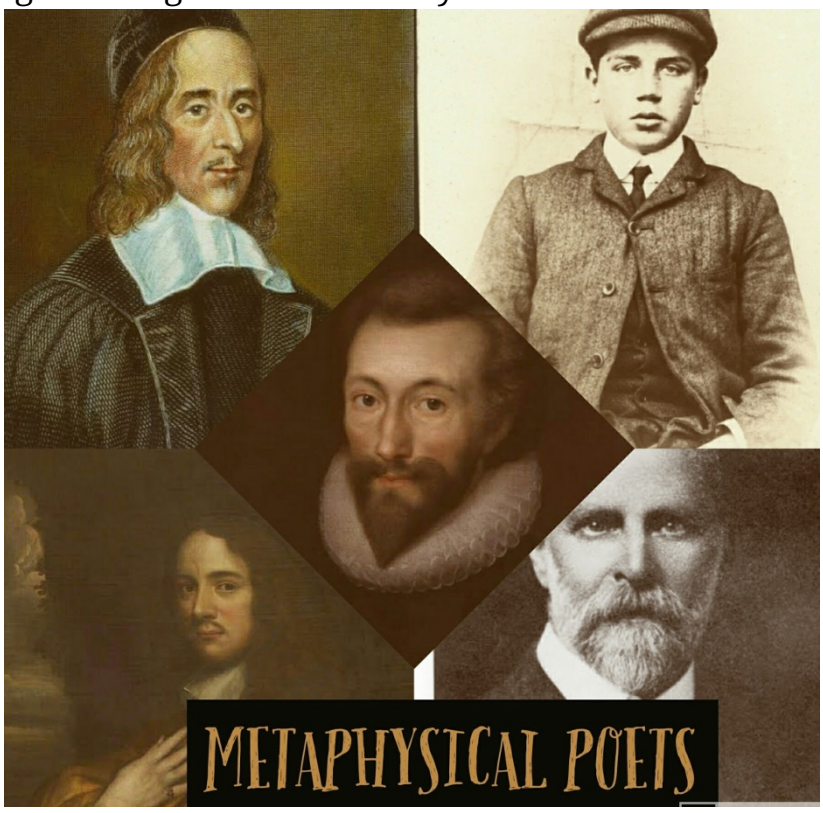
On 20th August 1589, James VI of Scotland, aged 22, was married to 14-year-old Anne of Denmark,

In the year 1590, King James VI of Scotland went to Denmark to marry Princess Anne. On their way back to Scotland by ship, a big and scary storm came. The sea was wild, and many ships were almost destroyed. The king was very afraid. He believed this was not just a normal storm. He said:

“Witches are trying to kill me. They made this storm!”

More than 70 people were suspected to be witches. Many were tortured until they gave names of others. Some were burned alive. One man, John Fian, was a teacher. He was tortured very badly. He said he had written a letter to the Devil using his own blood. Many innocent people died because of fear and false stories. Shakespeare was a smart playwright. He knew that if he wanted his plays to be successful, he had to please the king and the audience. Since James I believed in witches and enjoyed stories about them, Shakespeare added the three witches at the beginning of Macbeth. Shakespeare's later tragedies belong partly to this period: King Lear ,Macbeth, Othello. These plays show a world where ambition leads to destruction and moral certainty disappears.

Another important group of writers was the Metaphysical poets, especially John Donne. Their poetry used striking comparisons (conceits) and mixed love+religion+philosophy in new ways. For example, Donne compares lovers to the two legs of a compass in ***A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning***. The metaphysical poems feel tensed and argumentative rather than emotional and deep. This was because of the background against which they were written.



During the time of John Donne and the other metaphysical poets, Europe was experiencing the early Scientific Revolution, which completely changed people's understanding of the world. Copernicus proposed that the Sun, not the Earth, was at

the center of the universe, and this idea was supported by the observations of Galileo. Kepler showed that planets move in elliptical orbits instead of perfect circles, destroying the old belief in a perfectly ordered cosmos. At the same time, scientific thinkers began to study motion and natural laws mathematically, later fully developed by Isaac Newton, and William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood, proving that the human body works according to scientific principles. These discoveries shattered medieval certainty and created a sense of intellectual excitement as well as anxiety. The universe no longer seemed stable or centered on human beings, and traditional religious explanations were being questioned. As a result, metaphysical poets used unconventional conceits—bold, surprising, and intellectual comparisons drawn from science, mathematics, geography, and anatomy—because they were living in an age of radical change. Their complex metaphors reflect a fragmented and questioning world; instead of using simple images of nature, they turned to the new scientific ideas of their time to express love, faith, doubt, and human experience in a way that matched the intellectual spirit of their age. The poems often feel like debates rather than songs. That's why in Donne's Holy Sonnets, he even argues with God, challenges God and demands salvation passionately. Meanwhile, the King James Bible (1611) became one of the most influential texts in English prose, shaping the rhythm and vocabulary of the language for centuries. Overall , this period feels like the Renaissance mind becoming more thoughtful and self-questioning.

Metaphysical Poet Andrew Marvel

4. The Caroline and Commonwealth Period (1625–1660)

When King James I died in 1625, the throne passed to his son Charles I. This begins what we call the Caroline Period ("Caroline" comes from Carolus, the Latin word for Charles).

March 27th 1625: King James I of the United Kingdoms of England & Scotland, died at Goff's Oak. His second son ascended to the throne as Charles the first, King of England, Scotland and Ireland as well as claiming the crown of France.
James I by John de Critz
Charles I portrait by Anthony van Dyck

But this part of the Renaissance story feels very different from the bright confidence of the Elizabethan Age and the thoughtful seriousness of the Jacobean Age. Now the story becomes tensed and troubled, like the sky before a storm.

Let us Imagine London in the 1630s. The theatres that once performed Shakespeare's plays are still standing, poets are still writing, but the country is becoming divided. There is growing conflict between the king and Parliament, and also between different religious groups.
King Charles I believed strongly in the divine right of kings — the idea that a king's authority comes directly from God. Parliament, however, wanted more power in governing the country. At the same time, many Puritans (strict Protestants) believed the Church of England still looked too much like Catholicism.

These disagreements slowly pushed England toward civil war. Finally in 1642, the

English Civil War began between: ✔The Royalists (supporters of the king) and ✔The Parliamentarians (also known as Puritans). This war changed English society deeply. In 1649, something shocking happened — King Charles I was executed. For the first time in English history, a king was publicly put to death by his own people. After this, England became a Commonwealth, ruled by Oliver Cromwell instead of a monarch. This is why the later part of the period is called the Commonwealth Period.

King Charles I of England Bidding Farewell to His Children Before His Execution

Life changed greatly under Puritan rule. The Puritans believed the theatre encouraged immoral behaviour, so in 1642 theatres were closed. Public drama — which had been the heart of the Renaissance during Shakespeare's time — almost disappeared. It was as if the voice of Renaissance drama suddenly fell silent.

However, literature did not stop completely. One important writer of this time was John Milton. He supported the Puritan cause and wrote powerful prose about freedom,

religion, and government. Later, he wrote Paradise Lost, one of the greatest works in English literature. Milton's writing shows how Renaissance learning and Puritan seriousness could exist together.

Blind Milton dictates Paradise Lost simulteneously to his three daughters

By 1660, the conflict ended when the monarchy returned under Charles II. This moment is called **the Restoration**, and it marks the end of the Renaissance Age in England. After years of war and strict Puritan rule, England was ready for a new kind of literature and society.

Why this age ended?

When Charles I was executed in 1649, his son Charles II was only about 19 years old. He immediately became the symbol of the royalist cause, which made him dangerous to the new government. During the 1650s, England was ruled by Parliament and by Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell who did not want the monarchy to return. So Charles II had to escape like a fugitive. In 1651, Charles II tried to regain the throne by leading an army into England. But he was defeated at the Battle of Worcester by Cromwell's forces. After the defeat, Charles had to run for his life. For several weeks, he moved secretly across England, helped by ordinary people who supported the monarchy. According to a famous story, he even hid inside a large oak tree while soldiers searched for him nearby. This became known as the story of the "Royal Oak." Eventually, disguised as a servant, Charles travelled to the southern coast and escaped

by ship to France. He then lived in exile in Europe for about nine years, waiting for the political situation in England to change. When Cromwell died and the government weakened, Parliament invited Charles to return. In 1660, he came back to England as king — this moment became the Restoration.

Back then during the rule of Oliver Cromwell, England feels quiet and strict. The theatres are closed, public celebrations are limited, and many forms of entertainment are discouraged. The Puritans believe that the society should be serious, disciplined, and deeply religious.For almost twenty years, England lives without a king. But after Cromwell dies, the government becomes weak and unstable. People begin to feel tired of strict Puritan control. Many start to miss music, theatre, festivals, and even the monarchy. It is like a long winter when people begin to hope for spring.Then, in 1660, Charles II comes back to England and becomes king which starts the Restoration Age (1660–1700).

5. Restoration Age (1660–1700)

The word Restoration simply means “bringing back.” With the Restoration, England brings back: ✔the king ✔the royal court ✔the theatres
✔and a more relaxed social life.

The Merry Monarch : King Charles II

After the strict Puritan years, literature and society changed very quickly. During the Puritan/Commonwealth period (1649–1660): ✔theatres were closed ✔public entertainment was discouraged ✔society was morally strict
✔religious discipline controlled daily life.

People had to suppress enjoyment and social freedom for many years. When the monarchy returned in 1660, it felt like a sudden release of pressure. Another important reason was the king himself. Charles II had spent years in France, where royal courts were known for ✔fashion ✔theatre ✔dance ✔romance ✔witty conversation. When he returned to England, he brought this continental court culture with him. Unlike the serious Puritans, Charles II enjoyed theatre , parties ,conversation and humor. This influenced the tone of Restoration society and literature.

Because theatres had been closed for nearly 18 years, people were excited to see plays again. But society had changed. The drama is now very different from Shakespeare's time. Audiences were now more city-centerd and fashionable. Writers focused on city life and relationships. Drama became more realistic and social. This produced **Comedy of Manners**, which often showed: romantic games, clever conversation, satire of high society and sometimes sexual openness. This was not only entertainment — it was also a reaction against Puritan seriousness. The Puritans emphasized: morality, silence, discipline. On the other hand, Restoration culture emphasized: wit, pleasure and social freedom. It was almost like society swinging to the opposite side. Literature often reacts against the previous age. Each age responds to what came before it. It feels almost like a pendulum swinging in the opposite direction.

William Congreve

One famous writer of the Restoration Age is William Congreve, whose plays make fun

of the behaviour of rich and fashionable people. The language is clever, witty, and sometimes bold, very different from the moral seriousness of the Puritan age.

Poetry also changed during this period. Writers like John Dryden, the most important literary figure of the Restoration, wrote in a clear, balanced, and controlled style. Literature became more formal and intellectual, less emotional than Renaissance writing. Dryden wrote: poems, plays, essays and literary criticism. He helped shape English literature for the next century.

Charles II as President of the Royal Society

Another important change in the Restoration Age is the rise of science and reason. In 1660, the same year Charles II returned, the **Royal Society** was founded to encourage scientific research and observation. This shows that England was moving toward a more modern and rational way of thinking, preparing for the Age of Reason (the 18th century).

Why this age ended?

When Charles II returned in 1660, England laughed again. The theatres reopened, witty conversations filled the royal court, and writers enjoyed satire, humor, and fashionable life. Society had reacted strongly against the strict Puritan age.

But human history never stays at one extreme. After some decades of excitement, people slowly began to feel that too much freedom, too much wit, and too much pleasure could also create disorder. England was changing again — politically, socially, and intellectually. And so begins the Neoclassical Age (1700–1750).

6. Neoclassical Age (1700–1750)

Let us Imagine London in the early 1700s. It is no longer the dramatic Renaissance world of Shakespeare, nor the wild excitement of early Restoration theatre. Now the city is growing into a modern commercial society. Coffee houses are full of discussions about politics, science, business, and literature. This is the age of reason. In 1660, the same year Charles II returned, the Royal Society was founded to encourage scientific research and observation. The scientific spirit encouraged by the Royal Society during the Restoration is now stronger. People admire logic, balance, discipline, and common sense. Writers believe literature should teach as well as entertain.

Why It Is Called “Neoclassical”

“Neo” means new. “Classical” refers to ancient Greek and Roman writers like Virgil, Horace, and Aristotle. Writers of this age looked back to classical literature for models. They believed:

✔art should follow rules
✔literature should be balanced and controlled
✔emotion should not be excessive
✔reason should guide imagination

So unlike the Renaissance, which celebrated imagination and exploration, the Neoclassical Age valued discipline and harmony.

The Neo-classical Age is called the Augustan Age

The Neo-classical Age is called the Augustan Age because the writers of this period admired and imitated the literature produced during the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus. The Augustan Age of Rome was considered the Golden Age of Latin literature, when great writers like Virgil, Horace, and Ovid produced immortal works. English writers such as Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Addison followed their ideals of order, reason, balance, clarity, and artistic perfection. They also cultivated satire and the heroic couplet in imitation of the classical masters. For these similarities in literary ideals and achievements, the Neo-classical Age is known as the Augustan Age.

The Rise of Satire

The spirit of this age is best seen in satire — writing that corrects society by mocking its weaknesses. One great writer of this age is Alexander Pope. In his poem The Rape of the Lock, Pope makes fun of high society in a very polished and clever way. The poem is playful, but it also shows how small social problems can be treated as if they were heroic events. His language is smooth, balanced, and controlled — like carefully arranged architecture.

Another powerful satirist is Jonathan Swift. In Gulliver's Travels, Swift tells the story of strange lands and tiny people, but beneath the fantasy he is criticizing human pride, politics, and foolishness. It is imaginative, yet sharply rational.

The Age of Prose and Public Opinion

Unlike the Renaissance, which loved poetry and drama, the Neoclassical Age is often called the Age of Prose. Why? Because society is becoming more urban and practical. Newspapers, essays, and magazines become popular. Writers begin speaking directly to middle-class readers. Two important essayists are:

Joseph Addison
Richard Steele

Through magazines like **The Spectator**, they tried to educate society, improve manners, and promote moral behavior. Their writing is calm, reasonable, and polite.

Literature is no longer mainly for kings and nobles — it now speaks to ordinary educated citizens.

Why this age ended?

History often moves like a pendulum.

☞First comes imagination (Renaissance).
☞Then discipline (Neoclassical Age).
☞Then emotion returns (Age of Sensibility).

When literature becomes too controlled, writers begin to search for feeling. When literature becomes too emotional, writers later search for structure again. This is a natural human cycle. The Age of Reason taught society: order, logic,discipline, social responsibility. But once society became stable, people began asking: ***"What about the human heart?"*** And that question created the Age of Sensibility.

7. Age of Sensibility (1750–1798)

“Sensibility” means ***the ability to feel deeply***. During the Neoclassical Age (Age of Reason), Writers admire logic, balance, and discipline. Poetry follows rules, essays teach morality, and satire corrects society. For a time, this feels stable and intelligent. Society becomes more civilized, polite, and organized. But slowly, something begins to feel missing. People start to feel that life cannot be explained by reason alone. Human beings are not only thinking creatures — they are also feeling creatures.And this feeling begins to grow quietly in literature.

So, the writers begin to look away from:

✔ cities → toward nature
✔reason → toward emotion
✔satire → toward sympathy
✔society → toward individual experience

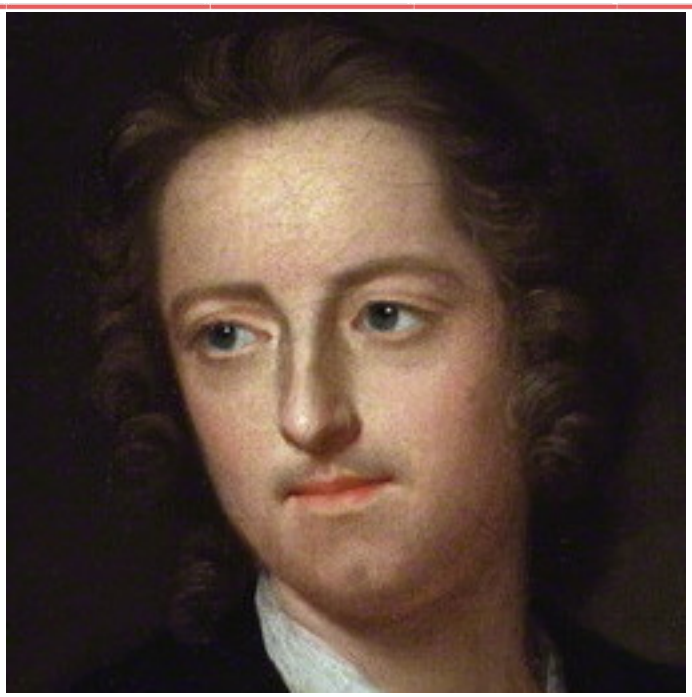
It is not a sudden revolution. It is more like a soft wind before a storm. Poetry becomes more gentle and emotional.
Writers begin to care about: ✔simple rural life ✔ordinary people ✔loneliness and reflection ✔death and memory. This new mood becomes known as the Age of Sensibility.

A Bridge Between Two Worlds

One of the best examples of this transition is Thomas Gray. In his poem Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, Gray does not write satire or heroic poetry. Instead, he quietly reflects on:

☞*unknown villagers*
☞*death*
☞*the value of ordinary lives*
☞*human emotion*

This poem still has Neoclassical balance, but its heart is emotional and reflective. That is why this age is often seen as a bridge between Neoclassicism and Romanticism.



Thomas Gray : made immortal just by one poem :
Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The Age of Sensibility prepares the way for the Romantic Age (1798–1832), where emotion, nature, imagination, and individuality will fully bloom in writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Why this age ended?

The French Revolution Changes Everything. In 1789, the French Revolution begins.The people of France rise against their king and demand:

✔liberty
✔equality
✔brotherhood

For the first time, ordinary people try to change society completely. Across Europe, especially in England, young writers feel excited and hopeful. They believe a new world is beginning, where human freedom and dignity will be respected. This political revolution becomes an emotional revolution in literature. In the Age of Sensibility writers begin to write about emotion, nature, imagination and about the lives of ordinary people But these feelings are still gentle and controlled, like a quiet river.Then suddenly, French Revolution shakes Europe. And the quiet river becomes a powerful current. Romanticism is born.

8. Romantic Age (1798–1837)

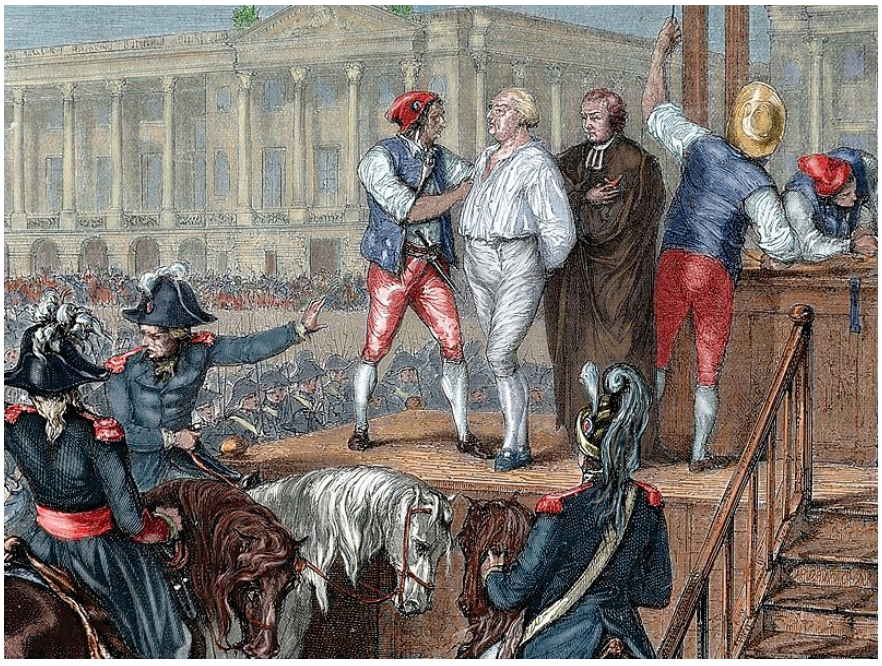
Let us imagine a young man — only 20 years old — standing in France in the early 1790s. His name is William Wordsworth. He is not yet the great Romantic poet we know. He is simply a young, thoughtful student, full of dreams about humanity and justice. It is 1790–1792. France is burning with excitement. The French Revolution has begun. The old monarchy is being challenged. People shout:

"Liberty! Equality! Fraternity !(=brotherhood)"

For young Wordsworth, this feels like the beginning of a new world. He had grown up in England at a time when society still had strong class divisions. The Revolution's message — that all human beings are equal — deeply moves him. When he travels to France, he does not feel like a foreigner. He feels like he is witnessing history being reborn. Later he wrote about his feeling of that time :

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

He truly believed that humanity was stepping into a brighter future. For him, the Revolution is not only political — it is moral and spiritual. He believes that human goodness will naturally rise once people are free. But history does not move gently. Soon, the Revolution becomes darker. In 1793–1794 comes the Reign of Terror. Soon, fear took control of the revolution itself.



In 1793, the French king, Louis XVI was executed by the guillotine.

People accused the king of betraying the nation. In 1793, the French king, Louis XVI was executed by the guillotine. Later that same year, the queen, Marie was also executed. Thousands others connected to the royal family or upperclass were executed in the way. Suspicion, fear, and blood replace hope. Then comes the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, who eventually crowns himself emperor. The dream of democracy slowly

turns into another form of power. For Wordsworth, this is heartbreaking.The movement that once stood for human equality now seems full of cruelty and ambition. The disappointment is not small. It shakes him deeply. For a time, Wordsworth falls into emotional depression. He feels that his political dreams have collapsed. But this disappointment does not destroy him. Instead, it transforms him. Wordsworth slowly turns away from political revolution and begins to search for something more permanent. He finds it in nature. He begins to believe:

☞***governments may fail***
☞***revolutions may become corrupt***
☞***but nature remains pure and healing***

Instead of trusting political change, he starts trusting the human heart and the natural world.This shift shapes his poetry forever. This is like his Political Hope transformed to Spiritual Hope. This marks the start of Romanticism in the history of English Literature. In his masterpiece, The Prelude, Wordsworth reflects on this experience. He admits that he was once blinded by revolutionary excitement. But through disappointment, he learns a deeper truth:

☞***True freedom is not only in political systems.***
☞***It is in the mind, in memory, in imagination.***

This is one of the reasons Romantic poetry becomes so inward-looking and emotional. In the year 1798, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge publish Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth writes about:

✔*nature*
✔*childhood*
✔*memory*
✔*simple rural life*
✔*deep personal feeling*

Another Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, continued to believe strongly in freedom and revolution. His poetry is full of hope for a future where human beings live in equality and imagination.

Why this age ended?

By the early 1800s, the Romantic Age was still alive with imagination. Poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron had filled literature with emotion, nature, freedom, and individual feeling. But the world around them was changing very quickly. And literature always follows life. The world stops looking like a Romantic poem anymore. England began transforming into an industrial nation. Factories rose where fields once existed Machines replaced handwork. Cities became crowded with workers. This transformation is known as the Industrial Revolution. Suddenly, life was no longer peaceful and natural like in Wordsworth's poetry. It became: noisy, mechanical, urban, and socially complicated. Romantic imagination alone could not explain this new reality.Writers began to feel the need to talk about real society, not just emotions. In 1837, a young queen came to the throne: Queen Victoria. Her long reign (1837–1901) gave the period its name — the Victorian Age.

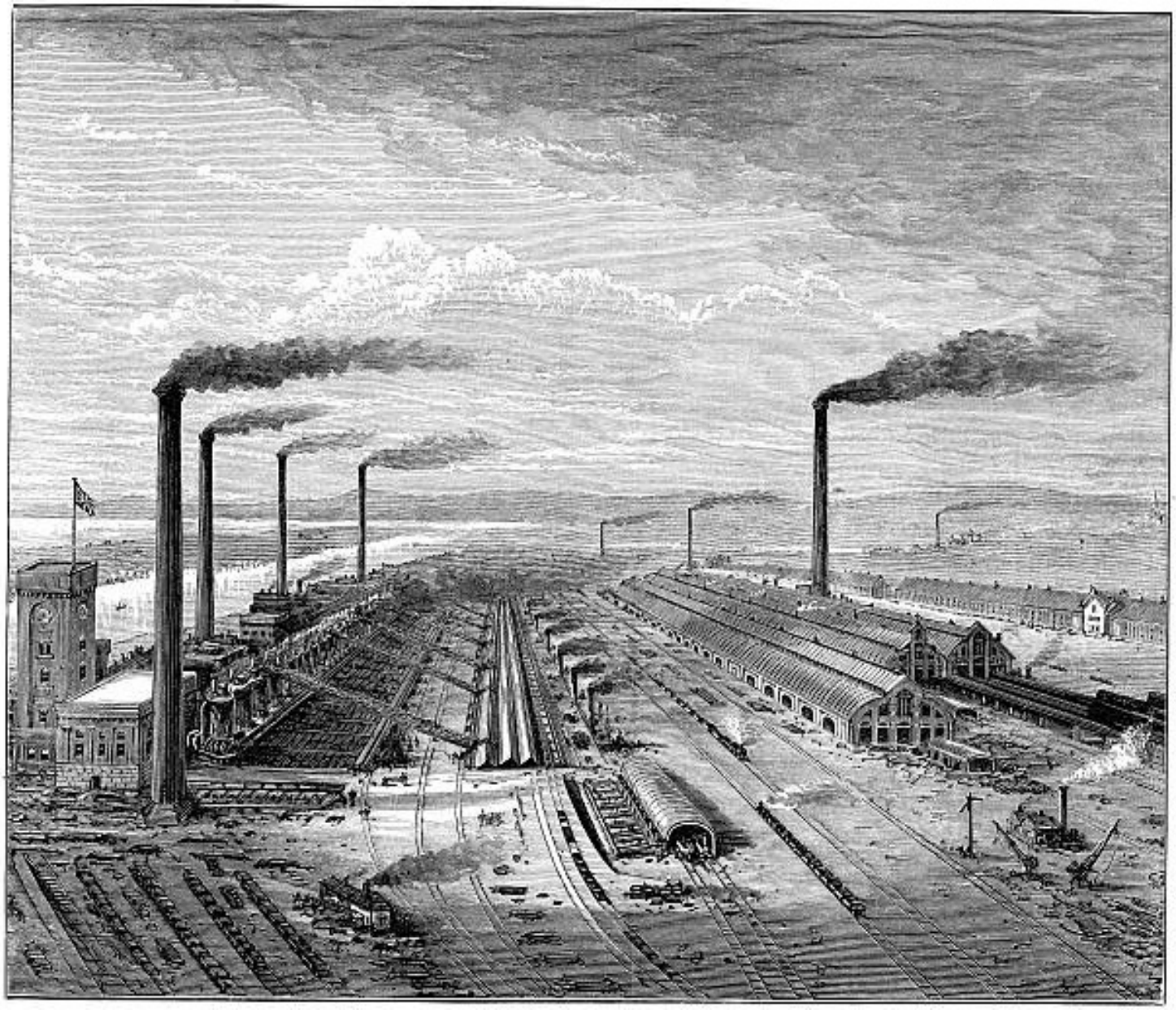
9. Victorian Age (1837–1901)

The Victorian age was very different from the Romantic spirit. If Romanticism asked:"***What does my heart feel?***" , the Victorian Age asked: "***How should society work?***"

The Monarchs: Queen Victoria (1837-1901) - The Grandmother of Europe

In the Victorian age, focus moved from nature and imagination to society and progress. Science challenges imagination. Discoveries in: engineering, medicine, biology- made people think more about logic, progress, and practical life. Later in the century, ideas like evolution from ***Charles Darwin*** challenged the biblical beliefs about humans and creation. The world was becoming more scientific and realistic, and literature followed. **Instead of writing about lonely poets in nature, Victorian writers began writing about real people in real society**. For example: Charles Dickens wrote about poor children and city life. George Eliot wrote about moral choices and society. Alfred Lord Tennyson tried to balance Romantic feeling with Victorian responsibility.

The Victorian age is mainly recognised for scientic advancement and its conflict with religion. Scientific development greatly shake the foundation of religion. Sceince had so developed that it gave life new meaning and dimensions. People began to suspect about religion. Human being even thought of wining death with the help of science.



Industrial revolution makes life materialistic. Darwin's ***The Origin of Species*** greatly shakes the foundation of the religious belief of the time. The theory stated that man had come upto the present stage through a process of gradual development called evolution. This theory goes against the biblical theory of creation. Moreover Darwin's theory told about the survival for the fittest theory which taught people to be the fittest among all , by all means - good or bad. People became divided in two sides. One side stick to the religious belief and the other side becomes the supporter of science. There is a third side who fluctuated between science and religion. ***Tennyson*** belonged to this side. But as a poet laureate , he had to give a solution to the confused people of his age. He had to show them their goal of life- to tell them that "***..There is always someone overhead and everything is gonna be fine.***" But, infact he himself was in spiritual tension. He could not leave behind his traditional belief. On the other hand,

he could not help accepting the call of modern science. So he must conciliate the two. He must find a way out where science and religion can mingle with each other. In the poem 'Ulyses' and 'In Memoriam' he supports the new sprit of the victorian age. On the other hand in 'Tithonus' and 'The Lotus Eaters' he says about the negative sides of science. The poet says that there is a divine law and order that works behind this universe. Human being should not dare to interfere or change that order. Trying to break the universal order will not bring any good result for human being. Death is the inevitable truth of life. It is a blessing in disguise. If anyone tries to challenge death, he will invite divine curse upon him. So in the Poem Tithonas , the poet warned people not to cross the divine law. So, we see that Tennyson wanted the people should accept the blessings of science but not by violating religious values. Science and religion could be mingled to make the way of life better and greater.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809—1892)

Matthew Arnold is another poet of this age who is much shocked by the attack on religion made by science of the time. His belief in God has been a source of solemn joy and inspiration of life. But the so called scientific development and new thories of the day has shattered his belief. In the poem Dover Beach he describes how the "Sea of Faith" has been dried up. Arnold believes that science has minimised the spiritual depth of human soul by maximising the distance between man and God. The scientific advancement of the age has made this world outwardly gorgeous , but not inwardly glorious. Life has no certainty,no goal . In his poems Arnold has shown the problem of the Victorian age such as – spiritual emptiness, lack of religious belief, doubts and confusion of the people of that time.

Why this age ended?

For a long time, Victorian England felt stable and confident. Industry was growing, the British Empire was powerful, and society believed in progress, morality, and order. But history was preparing a dramatic change. And the turning point came in 1901, when
Queen Victoria died. Her death symbolically ended an entire way of thinking. During the Victorian age, people believed strongly in:

✔***progress through science***
✔***moral discipline***
✔***social responsibility***
✔***religious values***

But as the new century began, these beliefs slowly began to shake. It was as if the solid Victorian building was still standing — but cracks were appearing in its walls. New thinkers and discoveries were changing how people understood reality itself. Sigmund Freud suggested that the human mind is driven by hidden unconscious forces.
Albert Einstein showed that time and space were not as fixed as people once believed
These ideas made the world feel less certain and more mysterious. At the same time, technology was transforming everyday life even faster than during the Industrial Revolution. People now experienced electricity ,telephones ,motor cars, cinema, airplanes and more discovetries. Cities became larger and more crowded. Life became faster and more complex. The confidence of Victorian society no longer matched this new reality. Writers began to feel that old literary styles could not express the modern experience.

Then came the event that truly separated the Victorian world from the modern one — World War I (1914–1918). The war shocked Europe deeply. Millions died. Machines were used not only in factories but also in destruction. The idea that civilization was always progressing suddenly seemed doubtful. The Victorian belief in steady improvement collapsed. After the war, many people felt: confused , disillusioned, and uncertain about the future. The world no longer felt orderly or meaningful in the old way. This emotional atmosphere gave birth to Modern literature.

10. Modern Age (1901–1945)

Victorian writers often tried to explain society clearly and morally. But in the modern age, the focus shifted from society outside to the mind inside. If Victorian literature asked: "***How should society live?***" Modern literature asked: "***What does it mean to be human in a confusing world?***"
World War I (1914–1918) ends, but it does not bring peace to the human mind. Europe is physically destroyed: ☞ *cities in ruins* ☞ *millions dead* ☞ *economies broken*. But something deeper is also damaged — faith in civilization itself. People had believed science and progress would improve life. Instead, machines were used for mass killing.Writers began to feel: "The old world has collapsed."

World War I : Total killed, wounded, missing: Over 38 million

The Great Depression results in 1929. Banks fail. Businesses close. Millions lose jobs. Poverty spreads across Europe and America.People feel: insecurity, hopelessness and anxiety about the future. Writers no longer believe in stable identity or clear purpose. Thats why characters in modern literature often feel: lost, alienated and disconnected from society.The modern individual feels pulled in many directions. The self is divided. Because:

☞***war shattered confidence***
☞***science questioned religion***
☞***industrial life created isolation***
☞***economic crisis destroyed security***

One of the most powerful voices of this broken world is T. S. Eliot. In 1922, he publishes The Waste Land. The poem does not tell a smooth story. It feels broken, scattered, full of different voices and sudden changes. Here Eliot is trying to show a fragmented civilization. He describes modern Europe as a "waste land": ☞spiritually empty ☞culturally exhausted ☞emotionally disconnected. The poem jumps from one speaker to another. It mixes myths, languages, and memories. It feels confusing — on purpose. The broken structure reflects a broken world.

T.S. Eloit

James Joyce

Another famous writer James Joyce presents the human mind as a Battlefield. He does something revolutionary. Instead of focusing on society outside, he dives deep into the human mind. In his novel Ulysses (1922), he uses a technique called stream of consciousness. It is a way of writing that tries to follow the natural flow of thoughts in a person's mind. Lets think about how our mind works:

- ☞ ***one memory leads to another***
- ☞***a sound triggers a childhood image***
- ☞***a simple word brings sudden emotion***

There is no clear order. Thoughts jump.Modern writers wanted literature to reflect this inner reality. So instead of writing: "He was sad.", they show: scattered memories ,half-finished sentences, sudden associations and so on Here the mind becomes the stage for varied and non-connected emotions to play con-currently.

Why this age ended?

The dropping of Atom bomb in World War II , damags everything beyond repair. So long, there is destruction, but there is hope as well. But now, there is no hope , only destruction. Nothing felt absolute anymore. Literature begins to question itself.

11. Postmodern Age (1945–Present)

Postmodernism is a literary movement that developed after the Second World War. It reflects a world that has lost faith in certainty, order, and absolute truth. It is often called the age of questions without answers. In this period, people no longer believe that life has one clear meaning or a single truth. The world appears broken, confusing, and disconnected. The famous idea "Nothing connects with nothing" expresses this condition. It means that events, ideas, and human relationships no longer fit together in a simple or meaningful way. Everything seems fragmented, uncertain, and without a fixed purpose.

Modern literature explored the fragmentation of the human mind, but postmodern literature goes a step further by presenting the fragmentation of reality itself. Nothing is fixed; everything is fluid. Modern writers witnessed destruction, felt deep pain, and still hoped that the world could be restored. In contrast, the postmodern mind believes that everything has already collapsed. There is little hope, little certainty, and even pain loses its meaning. As a result, postmodern literature often uses dark humour, irony, absurdity, parody, and uncertainty. It constantly questions whether reality itself is real and whether language can express truth at all.

A perfect example is Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. The two main characters spend the entire play waiting for someone named Godot, but he never arrives. The play has no traditional plot, no real character development, no clear ending, and no final message. Instead of providing answers, it leaves readers with more questions. This reflects the postmodern belief that life itself may have no fixed meaning. In the world of postmodernism, certainty disappears, truth becomes relative, and nothing connects with nothing.

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